Robert (Bob) Paley is Director of Transit-Oriented Development at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority where he manages development of MTA properties and works with regional and local entities to promote TOD and coordinate local land use policies and transit. Previously, Bob was Senior Development Director for AvalonBay Communities. At AvalonBay he coordinated a number of regional TOD projects, including the construction of residential buildings near the Metro North train stations in New Rochelle and White Plains, NY, and the mixed use projects known as Avalon Chrystie Place located on Houston Street in Manhattan adjacent to the Second Avenue station on the F line.

According to Bob, developers are adapting to changes in the residential real estate market that support more urban and transit-centered development. “We are ending a fifty year period of development based on the needs of automobiles where single use buildings are separated by parking lots. We understand that growth can no longer be based on this idea. Regional viability, not to mention the global environment, requires a model that puts communities at the center of design and which puts transit at the center of economic development.” To meet this need Bob explains that the real estate development industry is retooling itself to satisfy the growing demand for multi-use communities of housing, work places, and shopping that are easily accessible to transit. He notes that this is a long-term trend based on demographics and changing consumer preferences. “As the real estate industry continues to strengthen and sources of financing come back, I think this will ultimately be reflected in a growing public desire to reshape land use regulations to accommodate this market demand.”

Bob’s private sector development experience brings an important perspective to his work at the MTA. As he notes, promoting better relationships between land uses and transportation throughout a system as large as the MTA requires different approaches and tools in differing settings. It also requires the agency to get involved in a broad range of planning, zoning, real estate, and investment issues. Consequently, Bob recognizes that developers provide the entrepreneurial push and the investment capital that are critical to TOD. He explains, “Our office wants developers to know they can pick up the phone and have someone help with complications that arise when development and transit come together. We take a problem-solving approach whether it is a New York City zoning bonus project or a suburban development where we may have property included in a TOD project.”

MTA’s requirements bring an important perspective to his work at the MTA. He also managed the negotiations with Vornado Realty Trust to develop 15 Penn Plaza, a proposed office tower that would replace the Hotel Pennsylvania on Seventh Avenue between 32nd and 33rd streets in Manhattan and would result in transit improvements, including reopening the Gimbel’s Passageway that connects Herald Square and Penn Station.

Because the transit system operated by the MTA is large with over 700 stations, there are many opportunities to undertake TOD projects around these areas. One example is Long Island Rail Road’s Wyandanch station located on the Ronkonkoma Branch, which serves 3,500 riders daily. The Town of Babylon recognized that the station’s excellent service – soon to be improved with investment in a second running track – will drive demand for their planned TOD, Wyandanch Rising. (See Jan Well’s article here for more information.) That project is a major community revitalization initiative led by Babylon that seeks to transform an economically distressed downtown area into a transit-oriented, pedestrian friendly, environmentally sustainable community.

Despite the transit network’s maturity, Bob notes that there are some limited but important opportunities to add stations. For example, MTA is studying the potential for new Metro North stations in the eastern Bronx and a new LIRR Republic Airport station. Should new stations be located in these areas, substantial TOD opportunities may exist.

As part of his responsibilities at MTA, Bob also coordinates the agency’s involvement with the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium (SCC), a collaborative of...
municipal and county governments and planning entities seeking to promote development around MTA's commuter rail and subway networks. Bob explains that the studies being conducted by the SCC, while addressing unique local issues, will reinforce the potential for the MTA system to serve as the backbone for regional growth, which will boost the already huge dividends the region earns from investment in its transportation system.

Outside of his work at the MTA, Bob is an adjunct assistant professor of real estate development at Columbia University, is a member of the TOD Council of the Urban Land Institute, and serves on the Ardsley, New York Planning Board. Fortunately for the TOD Line, Bob also serves as an editorial board member.

Bob believes that the TOD Line fills a void in the region. As he notes, “national perspectives on TOD are now readily available, particularly concerning development around new or significantly expanding systems such as that in Denver, Colorado or Salt Lake City, Utah. Yet, these national perspectives don’t really fit for a system as mature as the New York metro area's.” To him, this region's issues will require solutions uniquely tailored for its communities. “The TOD Line will play a vital role in providing information and resources to the many people and groups who will craft these solutions – elected officials, citizen volunteers, government employees, developers, and advocates.”

TOOLS FOR GETTING TOD DONE


The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) rating system is a voluntary program that provides substantial guidance for developers who wish to develop projects in smart locations that are designed to create connected neighborhoods constituted by green buildings and infrastructure. The LEED-ND rating system, jointly developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), expands the definition of “green building” to include projects at a neighborhood or district scale, with greater consideration for project location.

As a national standard for green neighborhood planning and design, the LEED-ND rating system emphasizes site selection, design, and construction elements to bring buildings and infrastructure together and relate the neighborhood to its local and regional context. The LEED-ND rating system is divided into three credit categories: Smart Location and Linkage (SLL), Neighborhood Pattern and Design (NPD), and Green Infrastructure and Buildings (GIB). The SLL category emphasizes project location on connected and previously developed sites with existing infrastructure, near transit, and away from important natural resources. NPD recognizes compact, walkable, vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods with good connections to nearby communities. Finally, GIB recognizes building and infrastructure performance that reduces energy and water use, encourages historic preservation, and minimizes waste.

To help local governments leverage the LEED-ND rating system as a sustainability tool, the Land Use Law Center at Pace Law School, in collaboration with USGBC, has authored the Technical Guidance Manual for Sustainable Neighborhoods and a Neighborhood Development Floating Zone. Generous funding for the research, writing, and production of these resources was provided by the Fund for the Environment and Urban Life of The Oram Foundation, Inc., with additional support from the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The manual assists communities and their professionals by guiding them through the process of using LEED-ND to evaluate local plans, codes, and policies to incentivize sustainable growth and eliminate barriers to sustainable development projects. The manual aids this evaluation process because it breaks apart the standards contained within LEED-ND's prerequisites and credits and redistributes them into the structure of a typical local plan and code. Communities may use the manual simply to assess and amend existing codes and policies or to undertake a comprehensive overhaul to create an entirely new land development plan and implementing regulations. Municipalities also may use the manual to identify neighborhoods within a